

Wanderers are sixth — lowest for 11 years

WYCOMBE Wanderers completed their worst season for 11 years with a depressing home defeat against Sutton United in a match that clearly summed up the reasons for Blues' decline this season.

These include a shortage of fit and available players, a failure to convert chances and a tendency to ease up when in front. They were all in evidence in Saturday's Berger Isthmian League game at Loakes Park.

After cruising through the first half, when they earned a 1-0 lead — it should have been much more — Blues relaxed in the second and paid the penalty. They conceded two unnecessary goals to slump to their second successive home defeat and the fifth in all.

The loss means that Blues have to settle for sixth place — one below their keen local rivals Slough, who are not in

the habit of finishing above Wycombe in any sort of football table.

This position is the lowest Wanderers have achieved for 11 years, since they came eleventh in 1968. Since that time they have not been out of the top four in an unparalleled record of consistent success.

Revival

One of the players who helped Wycombe achieve those great heights, Larry Pritchard, played a key role in Sutton's revival on Saturday after one of the most one-sided first halves I have seen for a long time.

Wycombe, who were without the injured Paul Birdseye, dominated the first 45 minutes to such an extent that Sutton hardly moved out of their own half. The visitors,

however, defended well against Blues' moderate forward line — from which Steve Long was once again missing with a broken nose.

Apart from the athletic Atkins the forwards had an off-day. Terry Scott seemed to have run out of a steam after an arduous season, while Les Reed, although a willing trier — has never looked sharp enough to worry many defences.

It was left to Atkins to score Blues' only goal in the 24th minute. Considering the amount of pressure, it is strange to relate that the goal came out of the blue.

There seemed no danger as Atkins received the ball. With his back to goal just outside the penalty area. But he turned sharply and cracked a spectacular 20-yard drive into the roof of Dave Collyer's net —

and with his left foot too!

After that goal, the pressure intensified on the Sutton defence which thanks to the commanding presence of John Rains stood firm and rarely looked like conceding another goal.

The smattering of Blues' supporters, however, expected to see their side score more goals in the second half — but they came instead at the other end.

In the 47th minute Keith Mead fouled Paul McKinnon just outside the area. McKinnon required treatment after a knock in the face but indicated his fitness by slamming the resulting 20-yard free-kick just inside the right post.

Chris Way made a valiant but vain dive and must be questioned about the position of the defensive wall — which is, after all, his responsibility.

So Sutton, to their surprise were back in the game and began to play with far greater confidence against a side who just could not wait for the season to end.

Transformation

The transformation was remarkable and it was capped by the winning goal in the 64th minute, for which the young Way must take the principal — but not the total — blame.

Keith Mead had just broken up a Sutton attack but delayed so long in clearing the ball up-field, that in the end he had to pass hurriedly to Bob Davies.

Davies, himself, was under pressure and sent the ball straight back to Way — but not quite hard enough. Way had to make a quick forward move to gather the ball but was clearly off-balance as he did so. As he fell Way lost the ball which fell to the feet of McKinnon who took his time before tapping it into the empty net.

In the last 25 minutes of the match Wycombe forced nine corners — but not from one of them did they look like scoring.

Scott seems to have lost the knack of how to take them.

Instead it was Sutton who created the better chances, with their quick breaks unsettling the stretched Blues' defence.

Twice McKinnon spurned excellent opportunities to complete a hat-trick as Sutton coolly held on to their lead.

Wycombe's frustration showed through when skipper Howard Kennedy was booked for dissent three minutes from time. That was Wanderers' eighth league caution — their worst disciplinary record for many years.

WYCOMBE: C. Way; A. Phillips, R. Davies, K. Mead, S. Hardwick, D. Evans, S. Atkins, M. Hollfield, L. Reed (sub: Long 80 mins), H. Kennedy, T. Scott.

SUTTON: D. Collyer; H. Clark, D. Dyer, J. Rains, A. Rains, P. Jablonski, R. Southam, L. Pritchard, K. Walden, P. McKinnon, M. Joyce. Sub: M. Stephens (not used).

Referee: E. Griffith (London). **Half-time:** 1-0. **Scorers:** Wycombe — Atkins (24 mins); Sutton — McKinnon (47, 64).

BERGER ISTHMIAN LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barking	42	28	9	5	92	50	93
Dagenham	42	25	6	11	83	63	81
Enfield	42	22	11	9	88	37	77
Dulwich	42	21	13	8	68	39	76
Slough	42	20	12	10	61	44	72
Wycombe	42	20	9	13	89	44	69
Woking	42	18	14	10	79	59	68
Croydon	42	19	9	14	61	51	66
Hendon	42	16	14	12	55	48	62
Leatherhead	42	17	9	16	57	45	60
Sutton	42	17	9	16	62	51	60
Tooting	41	15	13	13	51	51	58
Walthamstow	42	15	6	21	61	69	51
Tilbury	42	13	11	18	60	76	50
Boreham Wd	42	13	10	19	50	67	49
Hitchin	42	12	11	19	59	71	47
Hayes	42	9	18	15	45	58	45
Carshalton	41	10	15	16	48	68	45
Oxford	42	12	7	23	50	80	43
Staines	42	8	16	20	40	64	34
Leytonstone	42	8	7	27	36	75	31
Kingston	42	3	15	24	35	72	24